

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-15

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03 NSC-05
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INFO AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, BR
SUBJECT: UNIONS LOBBY ON REFORMS DESPITE GOVERNMENT WARNINGS

1. SUMMARY: ABOUT A DOZEN TOP LABOR LEADERS CAME TO
BRASILIA THIS WEEK FROM SAO PAULO, RIO DE JANEIRO AND
MINAS GERAIS TO LOBBY CONGRESS ON THE SUBJECT OF PRESIDENT
GEISEL'S CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM PACKAGE. APPARENTLY EXPECTING
MANY MORE, AND CONCERNED OVER THE POSSIBILITY THAT THEY
INTENDED TO FORMALLY CONSTITUTE THEMSELVES INTO A COORDI-
NATED ACTION/PRESSURE GROUP (THERE WERE STRONG RUMORS OF A
POSSIBLE EFFORT TO FORM A CENTRAL WORKERS CONFEDERATION),
LABOR MINISTER PRIETO LAST SATURDAY ISSUED A DECREE ADVISING
THE LABOR LEADERS AGAINST ILLEGAL POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND
WARNING THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD ACT WITH FIRMNESS TO BACK
THE MEASURE. THOUGH THE GOVERNMENT'S STRONG MESSAGE
APPEARED AT ONE POINT TO HAVE SET THE STAGE FOR A POSSIBLE
CONFRONTATION, THE UNION LEADERS DENIED ANY HOSTILE INTENTION
AND MADE THEIR REPRESENTATION TO GENERALLY SYMPATHETIC
CONGRESSMEN IN A LOW-KEY MANNER WHICH APPARENTLY
GAVE NO OFFENSE TO THE ADMINISTRATION. UPON THEIR
DEPARTURE FROM BRASILIA, MINISTER PRIETO BACKED AWAY
FROM HIS EARLIER TOUGH LANGUAGE, ACKNOWLEDGED THE UNIONISTS
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HAD NOT DONE ANYTHING ILLEGAL AND SAID THEY WOULD THEREFORE NOT BE
SUBJECT TO PUNITIVE ACTION. END SUMMARY.

2. IN THE FACE OF WELL-PUBLICIZED PLANS BY TOP LABOR
REPRESENTATIVES TO COME TO BRASILIA AND LOBBY FOR
INCLUSION OF PRO-LABOR PROVISIONS IN THE GEISEL REFORM
PACKAGE, LABOR MINISTER PRIETO ISSUED A STRONGLY-WORDED

DECREE SEPTEMBER 9 TIGHTENING BANS ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY BY THE UNIONS. THE DECREE (WHICH THE PRESIDENT'S PRESS SPOKESMAN MADE CLEAR HAD BEEN APPROVED BEFOREHAND BY PRESIDENT GEISEL) NOTED THAT EXISTING LAW ALREADY PROHIBITS THE CONGREGATION OF LABOR LEADERS FOR PURPOSES OTHER THAN THOSE PROVIDED FOR IN LABOR LEGISLATION, AS WELL AS UNION POLITICAL ACTIVITIES GENERALLY. IT SPECIFIED THAT MEETINGS AND COLLECTIVE MOVEMENTS OF LABOR UNION LEADERS FOR THE PURPOSE OF TAKING COMMON ACTION, WITH POLITICAL OBJECTIVES, IS PROHIBITED BY THE CONSOLIDATION OF LABOR LAWS (CLT) AND WARNED LABOR LEADERS NOT TO COMMIT THEIR ORGANIZATIONS TO POLITICAL ACTIVITIES THAT WOULD VIOLATE THE LAW. ON THE EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 10, THE GOVERNMENT COMMANDEERED THE NATIONAL TELEVISION AND RADIO NETWORKS FOR AN ADDRESS BY PRIETO IN WHICH THE MINISTER REITERATED THE MAIN POINTS OF THE DECREE AND WARNED THAT THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD ACT WITH FIRMNESS IN ENFORCING IT.

3. APPARENTLY UNDETERRED BY THE GOVERNMENT MEASURE, LEADERS REPRESENTING SOME TWELVE INDIVIDUAL UNIONS IN BRASILIA, RIO, BELO HORIZONTE, AND SAO PAULO GATHERED HERE SEPTEMBER 11. DISAVOWING ANY ILLEGAL OR DISRUPTIVE INTENT, THE NOTED THAT PRESIDENT GEISEL HIMSELF HAD CALLED ON ORGANIZED LABOR, AMONG OTHER PARTIES, TO CONTRIBUTE TO A DISCUSSION OF THE REFORM PACKAGE, WHICH WAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WHAT THE UNIONS WERE SEEKING.

4. THE LABOR REPRESENTATIVES RECEIVED A SYMPATHETIC HEARING FROM LEGISLATORS, INCLUDING SENATE PRESIDENT PETRONIO PORTELLA, WHO LATER DESCRIBED THEIR PRESENTATION AS HIGHLY RESPECTFUL AND DEMOCRATIC. ARENA SENATE VICE LEADER AND FORMER LABOR MINISTER JARBAS PASSARINHO WENT FURTHER, STATING THAT HE CONSIDERED THE LABOR LEADERS' DESIRE TO TAKE THEIR CASE TO THE CONGRESS TO BE PERFECTLY LEGITIMATE. MDB PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE EULER BENTES MONTEIRO AND MAVERICK ARENA SENATOR (AND ERSTWHILE PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL) MAGALHAES PINTO ALSO SPOKE OUT IN SUPPORT OF THE LABOR LEADERS' RIGHT TO PRESENT THEIR CASE.

5. POSSIBLY INFLUENCED BY THIS SHOW OF SYMPATHY, THE ADMINISTRATION TOOK NO STEPS TO INHIBIT THE UNIONISTS' ACTIVITIES IN THE CAPITAL. THE LABOR REPRESENTATIVES DOUBTLESS HELPED THEIR OWN CAUSE IN THIS RESPECT BY SHOWING UP IN MODEST NUMBERS AND RESORTING TO NONE OF THE PROVOCATIONS WHICH THE GOVERNMENT -- FROM THE OUTSPOKENNESS OF ITS DECREE -- MAY HAVE ANTICIPATED. IN ANY EVENT LABOR MINISTER PRIETO

ANNOUNCED, FOLLOWING THE LABOR REPRESENTATIVES'
DEPARTURE, THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD SEEN NOTHING ILLEGAL
IN THEIR BEHAVIOR AND INTENDED TO TAKE NO PUNITIVE
ACTION AGAINST THEM.
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